

Word Study and Sort: Millennium

The word study of *millennium* is a topic of much interest this past year and there will continue to be interest in this word *millennium* through 20001 when, some believe, the third millennium will begin. Why has there been so much interest in the millennium? Is it all driven by Y2K? With this much curiosity, we had to explore this word with our students.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* and the word study books that are referenced on page 397 in the 2nd edition of *Words Their Way* were the references we used with our students; in particular, we used the word study books by Ayres, Ayto, Hoad, and Kennedy.

First, we divided *millennium* into syllables and sounds: *mil len ni um*. We noticed that there are two *ls* and two *ms*. Next, we made the meaning connections.

There was an easy meaning connection with *mille*: as in 1000 in *millimeter* and *millisecond*. The dictionary confirmed our thinking, but then we started to look at *million* and *mile*. You will find the study of *mile* interesting by itself. Not many of the students knew that a mile was originally a thousand paces? Throughout the word study books we saw that *milli-* is a combining form.

Here is some of the charting that we did together on a chart:

<i>mille</i>	1000	<i>ennium</i>	<i>um, ium</i>
millimeter		biennium	moratorium
millisecond		triennium	biennium
mile		annual	triennium
million			auditorium

When we focused on *millennium* we learned that it is a relatively new word from the 17th century and that it literally means 1000 years.

The study of the entire word led us to try to figure out what *ennium* might mean. After we thought of *biennium* and *triennium*, it became clear that *ennium* was related to the meaning and origin of *annual*.

The suffix *-ium* was not so clear to us, and according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this was never a "living suffix" in English. The second use of *-ium* found in names of metals and bases (*cadmium*, *titanium*, *benzenium*). A few students wanted to explore the singular and plural matches with this spelling, (i.e., *alumnus/alumni*), and a few students explored the *-on* in *million*, *billion*, and *trillion* and learned that it was derived from a French suffix that added *mille* to itself again, a thousand thousands.

The sort that follows can be an open sort to encourage a discussion like the one we have described here. As usual, we assume that the students can read these words. Students will probably create a *mille* column. They may be able to figure out what a *millenialist* is. The *Oxford English Dictionary* will show you them that such a person takes the *millennium* quite seriously with or without Y2K.

DC 14 millennium	millennium	million	trillion
milli-	million	millennial	centennial
biennial	millennialism	1000	milenio (Spanish)
millimeter	annual	100	millidegree
millicalories	triennium	biennium	delirium
biennium	emporium	millennialist	annualist

Supplementary Sort: -um, -ium

This supplementary sort can be an extension of the millennium sort. We would hypothesize that most of these words entered English around the 17th century. The bases of these words will lead to many word studies. Who wants to explore *aqua* words? Who will find words that have *audit* in them?

DC 15 -um -ium	aquarium	auditorium	axiom
compendium	cradium	crematorium	moratorium
radium	premium	medium	symposium
pandemonium	odium	Tedium	minimum
geranium	gymnasium	equilibrium	petroleum
emporium	pedestrian	residuum	Librium